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ABSTRACT

The ages between 10 and 14 years represent a period of transition between childhood and adolescence when feelings of confusion, anxiety, excitement, and frustration are widely experienced. During this period, early adolescents undergo major developmental changes. Educators working with these young people need accurate knowledge of early adolescents' physical, intellectual, emotional, social, moral, and ethical development, and the developmental tasks facing early adolescents. Educational institutions should focus on the appropriateness of curriculum for this stage of development and should provide necessary social and emotional support to adolescent students. Critics of middle-grade schools have pointed to a number of weaknesses and have put forth a variety of recommendations for transforming middle-level education. While there is no single model for the successful middle school, there is some consensus that: (1) schools can be large as long as they create subgroups of students that form small communities of learning; (2) interdisciplinary teams represent a keystone practice; (3) advisory groups provide critical socioemotional support; (4) middle schools should provide an environment in which students can explore personal interests in addition to the regular curriculum; (5) special programs may be needed to help students make an orderly transition from elementary to middle grades, and from middle grades to high school; (6) an appropriate core curriculum should be developed, and varied teaching strategies used to teach it; and (7) teachers should be prepared, caring, and empowered. (AC)

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Young Adolescents and Middle Level Education:

A Review of Current Issues, Concerns, and Recommendations

by

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Aurora, Colorado

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Young Adolescents and Middle Level Education:

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> **Early adolescence is a uniquely critical time during which young people emerge from the dependency of childhood to face the freedom, responsibility, and conflicting values of adulthood. Without information about this crucial period of growth and development, the adults who live and work with 10- to 15-year-olds may overreact inappropriately to normal adolescent behavior - or ignore serious problems in the mistaken hope that "they'll grow out of it."**
>
> **The Center for Early Adolescence**
> **University of North Carolina, at Chapel Hill**

There recently has been a flurry information about young adolescents and the importance of middle level education -- topped off with the publication of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development's *Turning Points*; the February, 1990 issue of the Phi Delta Kappan; and Pi Lambda Theta's Winter, 1990 edition of Educational Horizons. This follows a history of neglect, both in terms of a concern about and research in this area.

Why have today's adolescents and their education been commanding so much attention? According to McEwin and Thomason (1989), there are at least two major reasons. First, there is a paucity of specialized knowledge about this stage of development; and second, there is a recognition of and concern about increasing problems being experienced by more and more of these young people -- problems including teen pregnancy and parenthood, poverty, drug and alcohol use, and suicide. The purpose of this paper is to review current issues and concerns about today's adolescents and the world in which they are growing up, their characteristics and needs, some general recommendations for middle level education, and some specific structures and practices middle level schools can implement to meet the needs of young adolescents.

Issues and Concerns About Today's Adolescents

Known by such labels as transescents, tweeners, early adolescents, and young adolescents, this group comprises young people between the ages of 10 and 14 years. This time span represents a period of transition between childhood and adulthood and, more specifically, between childhood and adolescence (Lounsbury,

1990). While early adolescence is characterized by transition, it should not be related to simply as a transition.

> To see adolescence so exclusively as a transitional stage is to deny it the integrity we grant other stages of life. No large body of literature, for instance, refers to infancy or toddlerhood as transition (Lipsitz, cited in McEwin & Thomason, 1989, p. 7).

Using such a label "may serve as a barrier against concentrated attempts to enhance a more complete and accurate understanding of this important period" (McEwin & Thomason, 1989, p. 7).

Early adolescence is a time in life when such feelings as confusion, anxiety, excitement, and frustration are widely experienced and a stage whose members are often stereotyped as troublesome, unpredictable, wild, and turned off (Von Hoose and Strahan, 1988) -- a time coined by Hall (cited in Santrock, 1988) as one of storm and stress.

What makes this time in life so noteworthy is that, except for infancy, it represents the time of greatest human growth. As is pointed out by McEwin and Thomason (1989), "During this period twenty million 10 to 14 year olds experience major changes in physical, social, intellectual, and emotional development that are unparalleled in life, with the possible exception of the early days of infancy." (p. 1). Included in this growth is the beginning of puberty -- a period of rapid change to physical maturity of which sexual maturation is one of the most prominent aspects (Santrock, 1988). Characteristic of this period are

> radical changes...associated with self development...(that) always causes some type of stress; the degree and aspects vary, and lasting effects are the least known...at best, confusion and disorientation take place and, at worst, fear of the unknown is fostered (Arth, 1990, p. 105).

It is also a period distinguished by a tremendous diversity.

Lounsbury (1990) sums up the importance of this period: "Early adolescence is more than a transition to other major stages of life. It is, in fact, probably the

most crucial period of life" (p. 64). Why is this period so critical? This is a time during which young people are developing a sense of self, attempting to find a place in the peer group (Beane, 1990), and are beginning to "form their own answers to the fundamental questions of life and decide on the values and standards which largely determine their behavior in the future" (Lounsbury, 1990, p. 64). During this time they are particularly impressionable, malleable, and open to influence.

The Particular Context of Today's Adolescents

These things have always been true for young adolescents. However this period is exacerbated for today's youth. To begin with, they are entering puberty at a significantly younger age than in previous generations (a girl's first period is likely to begin at 12.5 instead of 17 as it did 150 years ago [Santrock, 1988]); thus they are biologically more mature while still intellectually and emotionally immature (Carnegie Council, 1989). This means that their bodies often require them to make decisions that they are not yet emotionally ready to make.

Second, the terms and conditions of early adolescence have changed dramatically -- drugs and alcohol are easily available and there is increased pressure to partake of them; violence and crime exists such that it is often not safe to walk to and from school; there is no longer a stable sense of community; family structures have changed significantly with single-parent households and blended families more prevalent; increasing numbers of young people live in poverty; and, in these times of rapid change, adult guidance often is unavailable. Today's young adolescents "face risks that were almost unknown to their parents or grandparents, and face those risks at an early age" (Carnegie Council, 1989, p. 22).

Glenn and Nelson (1988) discuss the changes that have come about in society, particularly since the end of World War II, and their repercussions. Changes include, among others, the move from a rural to an urban society with the con-

comitant loss of family networks of support, role models, communities of shared values, and opportunities to be meaningfully involved in life; changes in family structure (for example, blended, single parent, and both parents working,) leading to a decrease in meaningful dialogue, interaction, and support; and the advent of television with its wide range of potential and often "foreign" models and values.

"Our young people -- America's most precious resource -- are endangered. They are in trouble because the world around them has changed irrevocably while the schools have not" (Doyle, cited in Schurr, 1990, p. 58).

Brough (1990), in discussing the changing conditions faced by today's young adolescents, also calls on schools to respond.

> Middle level schools need to respond with programs and activities which help students cope with these changing societal structures. The purpose of any educational organization is to promote healthy physical, social, emotional, and cognitive growth of the students it serves. Since the world is changing for our students, so must their educational program change (p. 81).

It is widely recognized that for some young adolescents, the situation is even worse. The Carnegie Council states that

> The risks that all young people face are compounded for those who are poor, members of racial or ethnic minorities, or recent immigrants. These youth generally attend the weakest schools, have access to the least adequate health services, and have the fewest clearly visible paths to opportunities in the mainstream....For many of these young people, the American dream ends with the recognition that they are not wanted and are of little value in this society (Carnegie Council, 1989, pp. 25-29).

The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, which supports special programs for disadvantaged young people, also recognizes the special risk of at-risk early adolescents.

> ...the developmental changes that accompany early adolescence compound the problems of disadvantaged youth. At this age, peer approval becomes paramount. The desire for independence causes many young people to reject the conventional values of home and school. They may turn to friends who practice risky behaviors...If peers denigrate studying and academic achievement, a youth may willfully choose not to...perform well in school. All these events can ultimately limit future academic choices (Fleming, 1990, pp. 83-84).

With the onset of the information age and the shift to a more highly scientific and technological society, a different kind of workforce is needed: one whose members are more skilled, flexible, and adaptable to change. Approximately one third of this workforce will, beginning early in the next century, be made up of Blacks and Hispanics, the groups currently at the bottom educationally and economically. The Carnegie Council is calling for the development of *all* young people, not just the brightest and the best, if we are to continue to be a viable nation, if we are to be "economically competitive and socially cohesive" (Carnegie Council, 1989, p. 12). As it stands now,

> ...by age 15, substantial numbers of American youth are at risk of reaching adulthood unable to meet adequately the requirements of the workplace, the commitments of relationships in families and with friends, and the responsibilities of participation in a democratic society. These youth are among the estimated seven million young people - one in four adolescents - who are extremely vulnerable to multiple high-risk behaviors and school failure. Another seven million may be at moderate risk, but remain a cause for serious concern (Carnegie Council, 1989, p. 8).

The Council goes on to say that

> For many youth 10 to 15 years old, early adolescence offers opportunities to choose a path toward a productive and fulfilling life....(yet) Under current conditions...far too many...will not make the passage through early adolescence successfully....Millions...will never reach their full potential (Carnegie Council, 1989, p. 20).

It is for this reason that so much attention is suddenly being paid to the youth of this age group, to its characteristics, its needs, and how better to meet its needs.

Characteristics of the Young Adolescent

Those responsible for the education and welfare of today's young adolescents are beginning to focus the much needed attention and effort on helping them to make it successfully through this period of growth and development, armed with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and opportunities they need to reach their full potential and to become productive citizens in our society. However, and

> "unfortunately, early adolescence is a time if life about which we suffer from an embarrassing lack of knowledge...(and) It is in this state of ignorance that we define schooling for an age group experiencing the dramatic conjunction of rapid biological, social, emotional, and cognitive changes" (Lipsitz, 1984, p.6).

A major step in working with these young people is to have accurate knowledge about them so as to better understand them and their needs.*

Physical Development

As noted above, "early adolescence is characterized by periods of pronounced and accelerated growth...the most rapid growth period that humans experience with the exception of fetal and neonatal growth (Brooks-Gunn, cited in McEwin & Thomason, 1989, p. 3). And, again, there is great diversity in the timing and degree of these patterns with individual young people. Most young adolescents are very concerned about, and often preoccupied with, their physical and sexual development, so much so that it becomes a "developmental override" -- which results in their being more tuned in to their personal concerns than to what is going on in the classroom, for example (Van Hoose & Strahan, 1988). Furthermore, hormonal secretions are irregular, sometimes producing huge surges of adrenalin when it is not needed.

> This hormonal secretion is akin to an electrical power surge and it makes the student squirm and want to move, stretch and, perhaps, yell at the top of her lungs. However, she is expected to work quietly on square roots or some other assignment such as dangling participles. Only the most self-disciplined young adolescent can sit quietly at times like this (Van Hoose & Strahan, 1988, p. 6).

Knowing such information is useful for understanding and being able to work effectively with young adolescents who, in general:

1. Experience accelerated physical development marked by increases in weight, height, heart size, lung capacity, and muscular strength;

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* The lists of characteristics of young adolescents included in the following sections were reprinted, by permission, from Caught in the Middle: Educational Reform for Young Adolescents in California Public Schools, copyright 1987, California State Department of Education, P.O. Box 271, Sacramento, CA 95802-0271.

2. Mature at varying rates of speed. Girls tend to be taller than boys for the first two years of early adolescence and are ordinarily more physically developed than boys;

3. Experience bone growth faster than muscle development; uneven muscle/bone development results in lack of coordination and awkwardness; bones may lack protection of covering muscles and supporting tendons;

4. Reflect a wide range of individual differences which begin to appear in prepubertal and pubertal stages of development. Boys tend to lag behind girls. There are marked individual differences in physical development for boys and girls. The greatest variability in physiological development and size occurs at about age thirteen;

5. Experience biological development five years sooner than adolescents of the last century; the average age of menarche has dropped from seventeen to twelve years of age;

6. Face responsibility for sexual behavior before full emotional and social maturity has occurred;

7. Show changes in body contour including temporarily large noses, protruding ears, long arms; have posture problems;

8. Are often disturbed by body changes:
   o Girls are anxious about physical changes that accompany sexual maturation;
   o Boys are anxious about receding chins, cowlicks, dimples, and changes in their voices;

9. Experience fluctuations in basal metabolism which can cause extreme restlessness at times and equally extreme listlessness at other moments;

10. Have ravenous appetites and peculiar tastes; may overtax digestive system with large quantities of improper foods;

11. Lack physical health; have poor levels of endurance, strength, and flexibility; as a group are fatter and unhealthier;

12. Are physically at-risk; major causes of death are homicide, suicide, accident, and leukemia (Superintendent's Task Force, 1987, pp. 145-146).

Intellectual Development

Intellectual changes are not as easy to observe as physical changes, yet they are just as dramatic. Mental changes are often just as difficult to adjust to as the physical changes and, in fact, often precede the latter and affect how early adolescents adjust to them. This period is marked by the shift from Piaget's concrete to formal operational stage which includes the beginning of abstract thought, reason-

ing, and propositional thinking (McEwin & Thomason, 1989). It is important to note that the development of formal operational thought is not a continuous process and that, again, there is great variation in the age at which young adolescents enter the formal operational stage as well as the rate at which they assimilate and accommodate the actions and operations (Van Hoose & Strahan, 1988). Thus, an individual young person may be able to think abstractly in some areas but not in others. Again, a key to understanding young adolescents and to being able to work with them effectively is to be familiar with their intellectual development. Young adolescents:

1. Display a wide range of individual intellectual development as their minds experience transition from the concrete-manipulatory stage to the capacity for abstract thought;
2. Are intensely curious;
3. Prefer active over passive learning experiences; favor interaction with peers during learning activities;
4. Exhibit a strong willingness to learn things they consider to be useful; enjoy using skills to solve real life problems;
5. Are egocentric; argue to convince others; exhibit independent, critical thought;
6. Consider academic goals as a secondary level of priority; personal-social concerns dominate thoughts and activities;
7. Experience the phenomenon of metacognition - the ability to know what one knows and does not know;
8. Are intellectually at-risk; face decisions that have the potential to affect major academic values with lifelong consequences (Superintendent's Task Force, 1987, p. 144).

Emotional/Psychological Development

"In response to the turbulent changes experienced in physical and intellectual development, early adolescents experience dramatic changes in self concept" (Van Hoose & Strahan, 1988). It is critical, therefore, for them to be supported in developing a positive self concept, one in which they view themselves as competent, valuable, responsible, and as having a sense of control in their lives. This is

also a period when young people demonstrate a unique kind of egocentricism, represented by phenomena known as the "personal fable" and the "imaginary audience." The personal fable is the belief that they are incredibly unique and that no one, particularly an adult, can possibly understand them, and that they are indestructible, that nothing can happen to them. The imaginary audience is reflected in young adolescents' preoccupation with themselves and their notion that everyone else is just as wrapped up in them as they are. This results in both attention-getting behavior and a high degree of self-consciousness (Santrock, 1988). Beyond these characteristics, young adolescence can be a time of turbulent emotionality. While research doesn't support the contention that adolescence is, for all young people, a time of storm and stress, those who do experience significant turmoil may not recover (Dorman, cited in Children's Defense Fund, 1988). Fenwick (1986) warns that

> The transition to adolescence represents a genuine period of danger physically and emotionally for youth. Accidental death, suicide, drug abuse, and crime are statistically disproportionate during the teen years. Psychologists observe that normal, healthy adolescents are, by adult standards, variously manic, depressed, and even psychopathic in their behaviors as they confront turbulent, shifting, and often conflicting emotions and events in their lives (p. 28).

Thus, again, it is critical for those who work with early adolescents to know and understand what is going on for them emotionally and psychologically. With respect to this aspect of their development, young adolescents:

1. Are often erratic and inconsistent in their behavior; anxiety and fear are contrasted with periods of bravado; feelings shift between superiority and inferiority;

2. Have chemical and hormonal imbalances which often trigger emotions that are frightening and poorly understood; may regress to more childish behavior patterns at this point;

3. Are easily offended and are sensitive to criticism of personal shortcomings;

4. Tend to exaggerate simple occurrences and believe that personal problems, experiences, and feelings are unique to themselves;

5. Are moody, restless; often feel self-conscious and alienated; lack self-esteem; are introspective;

6. Are searching for adult identity and acceptance even in the midst of intense peer group relationships;

7. Are vulnerable to naive opinions, one-sided arguments;

8. Are searching to form a conscious sense of individual uniqueness -- "Who am I?"

9. Have emerging sense of humor based on increased intellectual ability to see abstract relationships; appreciate the "double entendre";

10. Are basically optimistic, hopeful;

11. Are psychologically at-risk; at no other point in human development is an individual likely to encounter so much diversity in relation to oneself and others (Superintendent's Task Force, 1987, p. 146).

Social Development

During the years of young adolescence, feelings about significant adults and peers undergo important changes. It is a period of confusion and conflict as young adolescents move away from their parents to establish their own identity and independence yet yearn for and need their parents' love, support, and guidance. As the young adolescent moves from dependency to interdependency with parents and other adults negotiating these relationships, they simultaneously seek to maintain strong ties with these very people, often feeling lonely and isolated (Carnegie Council, 1989). And as these young people move away from their parents and toward their peers, their peer relationships take on increasing importance. With this importance comes the concern and stress associated with wanting to belong and be accepted by others -- of the same and opposite sex. Within peer groups, transescents experiment with new and different roles in an effort to define appropriate behavior. Regarding their social development, young adolescents:

1. Experience often traumatic conflicts due to conflicting loyalties to peer groups and family;

2. Refer to peers as sources for standards and models of behavior; media heroes and heroines are also singularly important in shaping both behavior and fashion;

3. May be rebellious towards parents but still strongly dependent on parental values; want to make own choices, but the authority of the family is a critical factor in ultimate decisions;

4. Are impacted by high level of mobility in society; may become anxious and disoriented when peer group ties are broken because of family relocation to other communities;

5. Are often confused and frightened by new school settings which are large and impersonal;

6. Act out unusual or drastic behavior at times; may be aggressive, daring, boisterous, argumentative;

7. Are fiercely loyal to peer group values; sometimes cruel or insensitive to those outside the peer group;

8. Want to know and feel that significant adults, including parents and teachers, love and accept them; need frequent affirmation;

9. Sense negative impact of adolescent behaviors on parents and teachers; realize thin edge between tolerance and rejection; feelings of adult rejection drive the adolescent into the relatively secure social environment of the peer group;

10. Strive to define sex role characteristics; search to establish positive social relationships with members of the same and opposite sex;

11. Experience low risk-trust relationships with adults who show lack of sensitivity to adolescent characteristics and needs;

12. Challenge authority figures; test limits of acceptable behaviors;

13. Are socially at-risk; adult values are largely shaped conceptually during adolescence; negative interactions with peers, parents, and teachers may compromise ideals and commitments (Superintendent's Task Force, 1987, pp. 147-148).

Moral and Ethical Development

As was mentioned earlier, the period of early adolescence is one during which young people formulate answers to the fundamental questions of life and decide on the values that are important to and fitting for them. As a result, it is important to understand the moral and ethical development of young adolescents who:

1. Are essentially idealistic; have a strong sense of fairness in human relationships;

2. Experience thoughts and feelings of awe and wonder related to their expanding intellectual and emotional awareness;

3. Ask large, unanswerable questions about the meaning of life; do not expect absolute answers but are turned off by trivial adult responses;

4. Are reflective, analytical, and introspective about their thoughts and feelings;

5. Confront hard moral and ethical questions for which they are unprepared to cope;

6. Are at-risk in the development of moral and ethical choices and behaviors; primary dependency on the influences of home and church for moral and ethical development seriously compromises adolescents for whom these resources are absent; adolescents want to explore the moral and ethical issues which are confronted in the curriculum, in the media, and in the daily interactions they experience in their families and peer groups (Superintendent's Task Force, 1987, p. 148).

Despite the lengthy lists of developmental characteristics listed above, "less is known about the developmental stage than about any other time in life...Knowledge is increasing, however, and concentrated efforts should be made to learn more about the behavior of these youth and the root causes of that behavior" (McEwin & Thomason, 1989, p. 6).

Developmental Tasks

As a result of the developmental changes they are going through, young adolescents are faced with some important tasks. Cole (1988) identifies six such tasks confronting early adolescents.

Task 1: Transescents begin to develop an identity independent of adults.

Task 2: Emerging adolescents consider their own values and attempt to resolve moral conflicts resulting from increased independence and wider contact with the world.

Task 3. Middle schoolers must learn to cope with emotional, physical, and social changes that occur between childhood and adolescence.

Task 4: Transescents need to explore their interests and capacities and their relationship to future education, work, and leisure.

Task 5: Each middle school student tries to understand the relationship between self and the peer group.

Task 6: Emerging adolescents are learning to make decisions and to accept responsibility for self.

Meeting Young Adolescents' Developmental Needs

The Carnegie Council points out that because early adolescence is the last time to reach and impact many of these young people, it is critical to do everything we can to help them develop into the adults they are capable of becoming. This includes providing the support necessary for them to accomplish the developmental tasks outlined above. As stated by the Council (1989),

> There is a crucial need to help adolescents at this early age to acquire durable self-esteem, flexible and inquiring habits of the mind, reliable and relatively close human relationships, a sense of belonging in a valued group, and a sense of usefulness in some way beyond the self....The challenge for educational...institutions is thus to help provide the building blocks of adolescent development and preparation for adult life (p. 12).

What is being called for is educational institutions that meet early adolescents' developmental needs -- institutions that focus on developmental appropriateness, that is, embody content and structures appropriate to this stage of development, and provide the critical socioemotional support necessary for the positive development of their students.

Developmental Appropriateness. Most experts in the area of middle level education agree that to succeed with young adolescents, schools must be responsive to their developmental needs. This, in effect, means that academic pursuits cannot be their sole purpose. They must become environments that promote physical, emotional/psychological, social, and moral/ethical development in addition to intellectual development.

A school that focuses on developmental appropriateness is one that is both willing and able to adapt all school practices to the individual differences in intellectual, physical, and social maturation of its students; emphasizes the importance of creating an environment that is positive for adolescents' social and personality development -- not just because this contributes to academic achievement but because such development is valuable in and of itself; structures the school as

a community of support and caring; makes the adults and adolescents feel special; and incorporates diverse and exciting curriculum that provides opportunities for exploration, self-discovery, social interaction, competence, and achievement (Lipsitz, 1984).

Socioemotional Support. Young adolescents need an environment of socioemotional support in which to grow and develop. As they begin to define their own identity and move away from their parents to establish their independence, they need to establish close relationships with other caring and supportive adults. And the nature of today's world, with most parents working and a lack of extended family, accentuates this need. The Carnegie Council (1989) states that

> Caring is crucial to the development of young adolescents into healthy adults. Young adolescents need to see themselves as valued members of a group that offers mutual support and trusting relationships. They need to be able to succeed at something, and to be praised and rewarded for that success. They need to become socially competent individuals who have the skills to cope successfully with the exigencies of everyday life. They need to believe that they have a promising future, and they need the competence to take advantage of real opportunities in a society in which they have a stake (p. 33).

Glenn & Nelson (1988) suggest the following for creating a climate of support:

1. An openness to exploring another person's point of view
2. Listening with the purpose of understanding another person's point of view
3. Empathy, which results only from careful listening
4. A genuineness conveyed through warmth and interest
5. The ownership of personal feelings
6. Respect for differing points of view (p.68).

Specific needs must be addressed by the structure and programs of developmentally appropriate, socioemotionally supportive schools to promote the necessary for the healthy development of young adolescents. These include the fol-

lowing, summarized from the Center for Early Adolescence *Middle Grades Assessment Program* (cited in Children's Defense Fund, 1988, p. 26):

- **The need for diversity.** Because young adolescents are developing new physical and intellectual abilities as well as undergoing personal and emotional changes, they need different kinds of opportunities for learning, for relationships with a variety of people, and for personal reflection and self-exploration. These opportunities will help them plan for a future career, establish a sense of identity, and learn appropriate social behavior.

- **The need for self-exploration and self-definition.** Because adolescents are establishing a sense of who they are and what they can do, they need quiet time alone as well as time with peers and adults.

- **The need for meaningful participation in school and community.** Young adolescents want to assume a place in the world around them; they want to take on new responsibilities, have a role in the rules that affect them and help other people. Opportunities to make meaningful contributions to their families, schools, and communities can help them satisfy those needs.

- **The need for positive social interaction with both peers and adults.** Because adolescents depend on peers for companionship and approval, and on parents and other adults for affection, values, and support in solving difficult problems, they need opportunities to interact with both groups.

- **The need for physical activity.** Young adolescents go through bursts of high energy, alternating with periods of laziness. High energy levels may be related to hormonal activity and rapid physical development; fatigue may be related to hormones, excessive physical activity, or emotional stress.

- **The need for competence and achievement.** As adolescents develop new physical, intellectual, and social abilities, they need opportunities to measure their progress. Success is especially important because many adolescents have low self-esteem. Competence must be rewarded; it helps raise self-esteem and promotes strong development.

- **The need for structure and clear limits.** As adolescents begin to regulate their own behavior, they need to know what is expected of them. Clear limits help youngsters develop the internal standards that will serve as personal guides for behavior. Limits and structure also help prevent adolescents from harming themselves, ensure that some experiences are tailored for success, and let adolescents know that adults care about them.

General Recommendations For Middle Level Education

During the first part of this century, a two-level organization of schooling (elementary and high school) predominated while a movement was afoot to include a third level. The third level that did evolve was most commonly called the junior high school. By the 1960s, it was in general disfavor, largely because educators re-

alized "that its content and methods were more suitable for high school students and that it failed to serve as a bridge between childhood and adolescence" (Reinhartz & Beach, 1983, p.5). Criticism included the following: programs and practices were not suitable to the intellectual development and social maturity of young adolescents; course content was often a watered down version of high school curriculum; emphasis on interscholastic competition left out many students; students were tracked into vocational and academic tracks very early; there was no focus on the physical, social, and emotional needs of students; and students were abruptly changed from the safe, personal environment of the elementary school to the highly structured, departmentalized program of the junior high (Sale, 1979).

Such criticism, and a general satisfaction with the traditional junior high, led to a middle school movement that focuses on educational experiences specifically designed for young adolescents. The National Middle School Association (NMSA, 1982), defines middle schools as "an educational response to the needs and characteristics of youngsters during transescence and, as such, deals with the full range of intellectual and developmental needs" (p. 9) -- a definition which does *not* include specifics about grades or courses. The Association sets forth the "essential elements of a 'true' middle school." Such a middle school has: educators knowledgeable about and committed to transescents; a balanced curriculum based on transescent needs; a range of organizational arrangements; varied instructional strategies; a full exploratory program; comprehensive advising and counseling; continuous progress for students; evaluation procedures compatible with the nature of transescents; cooperative planning; and a positive school climate.

Today, virtually all middle level educators, whether proponents or practitioners of junior high or middle schools, have coalesced "into a single cause -- the cause of improving early adolescent education" (Lounsbury, 1990, p. 63).

A Call for Transformed Middle Level Education

While it accuses too many existing middle grade schools of "exacerbating the problems of young adolescents" -- because of the "volatile mismatch (that) exists between the organization and curriculum of middle grade schools and the intellectual and emotional needs of young adolescents" (pp. 8-9), and because "...many middle grade schools pay little attention to the emotional, physical, and social development of their students..." (p. 32) -- the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) maintains that "Middle grade schools - junior high, intermediate, and middle schools - are potentially society's most powerful force to recapture millions of youth adrift, and help every young person thrive during early adolescence" (p. 8).

The Council goes on further to say that, "The early adolescent years are crucial in determining the future success or failure of millions of American youth," that we have both a moral responsibility and economic imperative to educate these young people, and, therefore, "All sectors of the society must be mobilized to build a national consensus to make transformation of middle grade schools a reality" (p. 10).

The Council thus proposes recommendations for transforming middle school grade schools and improving the educational experience of all students, while benefitting most those at risk of being left behind. The recommendations include the following:

- *Create small communities for learning* where stable, close, mutually respectful relationships with adults and peers are considered fundamental for intellectual development and personal growth...
- *Teach a core academic program* that results in students who are literate...and who know how to think critically, lead a healthy life, behave ethically, and assume the responsibilities of citizenship...
- *Ensure success for all students* through elimination of tracking by achievement level and promotion of cooperative learning, flexibility in arranging instructional time, and adequate resources...for teachers.
- *Empower teachers and administrators to make decisions about the experiences of middle grade students...*

- *Staff middle grade schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents* and who have been specially prepared for assignment to the middle grades.

- *Improve academic performance through fostering the health and fitness of young adolescents...*

- *Re-engage families in the education of young adolescents* by giving families meaningful roles...

- *Connect schools with communities*, which together share responsibility for each middle grade student's success, through identifying service opportunities...establishing partnerships and collaborations... (Carnegie Council, 1989, pp. 9-10).

By following such recommendations and having "all sectors that care about youth...form partnerships that will create for young adolescents a time of purposeful exploration and preparation for constructive adulthood" (Carnegie Council, 1989, p.10), the Council proposes that "...a community of learning can be created that engages those young adolescents for whom life already holds high promise, and welcomes into the mainstream of society those who might otherwise be left behind" (Carnegie Council, p.11).

The California Superintendent's Task Force (1987) likewise recognizes the critical nature of adolescence and the potential of effective middle level education:

> The urgency of middle grade educational reform is accentuated by the gravity of dropout statistics...Unless dramatic changes occur which capture the intellects and emotions of young adolescents, this loss of human potential will continue to intensify At present, the middle grades represent the last substantive educational experience for hundreds of thousands of students (p. vii).

The reform agenda proposed by the Task Force attempts to reconcile the personal and the academic needs with the developmental characteristics of young adolescents. In so doing, it addresses twenty-two principles of middle grade education in five areas:

1. Curriculum and Instruction: Achieving Academic Excellence -- which includes principles and recommendations dealing with the core curriculum, knowledge, thinking and communication, character development, learning to learn, and instructional practice;

2. Student Potential: Realizing the "Highest and Best" Intellectual, Social, Emotional, and Physical Development -- which focuses on academic counseling, equal access, student diversity and underrepresented minorities, at-risk students, and the physical and emotional development of students;

3. Organization and Structure: Creating New Learning Environments -- which deals with the areas of school culture, extracurricular and intramural activities, student accountability, transition, structure, scheduling, and assessment;

4. Teaching and Administration: Preparing for Exemplary Performance -- which includes professional preparation and staff development; and

5. Leadership and Partnership: Defining the Catalysts for Middle Grade Educational Reform -- which addresses parents, communities, and school boards; and state-of-the-art middle grade schools.

The Children's Defense Fund (1988), too, criticizes middle grade schools for failing to reach many of their students, and also believes that "The early adolescent years may be the best time to provide intervention strategies that may help children avoid academic failure and behavior problems" (p. 5), pointing out that relatively few young adolescents drop out, usually delaying the action until they are in their mid-teens. (Fleming [1990], too, states that the middle grades shape many disadvantaged students' decision about staying in or dropping out of school.) Their "blueprint for teaching young adolescents effectively" focuses on unit size and organization (small and interdisciplinary); scheduling (flexible); curriculum and instruction (higher order skills, values, independent learning, "active" learning); counseling (academic advice and emotional support); discipline (clear limits and increasing self-regulation); alternatives to grade retention and suspension; extended time for learning; transition; and parental involvement.

By recognizing that the middle grades are unique and taking into account the physical, emotional, and social needs of the students, the Fund, too, purports that the middle grades can play an important role "in shepherding young people through the often troubled years of early adolescence and into successful and productive adulthood" (Children's Defense Fund, 1988, p. 2).

Lounsbury (1990. pp. 66-68) goes further by calling for the changes in the following conditions -- which include changes in society as well as in the education community -- if middle level schools are to be effective:

1. The general public lacks adequate understanding about and appreciation for the age of early adolescence -- only then will there be adequate support for appropriate programs and practices (p. 66).

2. The societal context in which education is provided today is particularly complex, heavily negative, highly visible, and largely non-supportive -- society's problems have become handicaps to the education of young adolescents (p. 66).

3. The role of the teacher in the middle years needs to be redefined -- teachers must become coaches, even students; they must get "on the same side of the desk" (p.66).

4. The place and the value of curriculum content must be re-examined and realistically assessed -- content is less important than learning to solve problems, think creatively, and behave responsibly (p. 67).

5. The development of attitudes, character, and values must become priority items on the educational agenda of middle schools -- "the ultimate objective of education lies in behavior, and behavior is attitude driven rather than information driven" (p. 67).

6. The development of all the communication skills must become a school-wide priority -- the "power of language" ensures an informed and responsible citizenry (p. 67).

7. Teacher education and certification must be altered to facilitate the preparation of personnel for middle level schools -- "For teachers to be effective at this level they must understand this age group...(and) be able to provide the support and guidance these youngsters need in their psycho-social development" (p. 68).

Characteristics of Effective Middle Schools. "Many variables influence a middle school" (Kohut, Jr., 1988, p. 6). Consequently, researchers and educators have attempted to identify elements that make them effective. Sale (1979), for example, calls for middle grade schools to provide:

1. A custom-tailored program attuned to the growth and development characteristics of an emerging adolescent learner. The environment should emphasize that the learner, not the program, is important.

2. An intellectually stimulating curriculum that is rich in options and exploratory experiences and that builds on learning acquired during the elementary school years rather than mimicking the secondary school program.

3. Instructional organization patterns that provide students with a smooth transition from elementary to secondary school, incorporating the security features of the self-contained classroom with the benefits of interaction with varied teachers.

4. A personalized health and physical education program that emphasizes physical fitness, personal hygiene, and carry-over sports for all as opposed to secondary school-type team sports aimed at a few students.

5. Career-based curricular experiences for all students that interrelate career exploration with all academic areas.

6. Competent teachers, administrators, guidance staff, and related school personnel specifically prepared to help the emerging adolescent learner.

7. Assistance to students in developing a personal values system based on careful assessment of various value positions in society. Assistance in developing positive self-concepts should also be provided to all students.

8. A school evaluation program that places primary emphasis on assessment based on the progress a student makes in relation to his own ability and secondary emphasis on assessment in terms of the norm.

9. Facilities and material resources adaptable to the current needs of the emerging adolescent.

10. A school-community relations program that provides for positive citizen involvement in and support of school activities (p. 6).

Merenbloom (1988) offers a set of eleven characteristics of an effective middle level school, based on the research of both the middle school and effective schools movements. An effective middle school:

1. Features a program that responds to the physical, intellectual, social-emotional and moral needs of early adolescents.

2. Has a set of documents to guide all aspects of the program.

3. Possesses a definite curriculum plan that includes organized knowledge, skills, and personal development activities.

4. Has a clearly established program of studies based upon the concept of exploration and provides opportunities for student growth.

5. Builds on the strengths of elementary education and prepares students for success in high school.

6. Employs teachers who focus on the learning needs of pupils by using appropriate teaching strategies.

7. Creates teaching teams using blocks of time to best deliver the instructional program.

8. Emphasizes the guidance and counseling function of staff members by providing for a home-base program, stressing the importance of self-concept, and providing a positive climate.

9. Promotes flexibility in implementing the daily, weekly, and monthly schedule to meet the varying needs of students.

10. Actively involves parents in various aspects of the school experience.

11. Evaluates the program on a regular basis and makes changes that enhance the learning (pp. 5-9).

These characteristics, suggests Merenbloom, can guide the establishment of an effective middle grade school , whether the school is transitioning to the middle concept, revising or expanding its existing program, or setting long-term goals.

Finally, Alexander and McEwin (1989) believe that a good middle level school should exhibit the following characteristics:

1. An interdisciplinary organization with a flexibly scheduled day.

2. An adequate guidance program, including a teacher advisory plan.

3. A full-scale exploratory program.

4. Curriculum provision for such broad goals and curriculum domains as personal development, continued learning skills, and basic knowledge areas.

5. Varied and effective instructional methodology for the age group.

6. Continued orientation and articulation for students, parents, and teachers (pp. 84-85).

Alexander and McEwin (1989), as a result of their national middle grade school survey, conclude that while middle level education "is moving toward becoming a full partner in the new three-level system of education" (p. 85), and progress is being made toward implementing the desirable characteristics, most schools have not yet instituted the structures and practices known to make middle grade schools better meet the needs of young adolescents. Some of these structures and practices are discussed below.

Structures and Practices in Effective Middle Level Schools

Researchers generally agree that there is no single model or design for the successful middle grade school but, rather, that successful middle level schools are designed to meet the needs of early adolescents. They include organizational features and classroom practices that foster learning and human development (Lipsitz, 1984; Children's Defense Fund, 1988; McPartland, 1987).

Today there is, with the exception of grade span, a fair amount of consensus (Alexander & McEwin, 1989; Superintendent's Task Force, 1987; Carnegie Council, 1989; Children's Defense Fund, 1988;) about a number of structures and practices that increase the likelihood of a middle school meeting the needs of and being effective with young adolescents. What follows is a description of these structures and practices.

Grade Span

There are numerous forms of school organization that contain young adolescents. These include K-8, K-12, 4-8, 5-8, 6-8, 7-8, 7-9, and 7-12. There are conflicting findings about whether there is an ideal configuration, that is, grade span, for the successful middle grade school. Some (Cawelti, 1988; Alexander & McEwin, 1989, McEwin, 1990) suggest that an organization of grades six through eight is what works best -- that is, is most likely to provide the characteristics or programs that meet the needs of young adolescents. Others (Epstein, 1990; Epstein & MacIver, 1990; Sale, 1979) assert that while some practices are more prominent in some middle grade schools than other, "With the information available at this time, neither we nor any one can say for sure that there is one 'best' grade span or program for all middle grades in the U.S." (Epstein & MacIver, p. 92).

School Size

Most educators (Carnegie Council, 1989; Children's Defense Fund, 1988; Epstein, 1990; Epstein & MacIver, 1990; Superintendent's Task Force, 1987) agree that

schools themselves can be large as long as they create subgroups of students that are small -- for example, "houses," "wings," "clusters," "schools within schools," and the like. Smaller groups are more effective because they provide for closer, more stable student-teacher relationships and peer support networks. They also reduce anonymity and isolation both for students and teachers. "...the preferred approach is to create small 'communities for learning'... to create responsive environments that provide students with care and support (Epstein, 1990).

Interdisciplinary Teams

While most middle grade schools continue to be organized by departments, MacIver (1989) points out that

> The research on departmentalization indicates that use of subject matter specialists does not always result in higher student achievement, because the increases in instructional quality that accompany departmentalization are sometimes outweighed by the negative effects of departmentalization on teach-student relations and on other factors that influence student motivation and achievement (p. vii).

Thus, "Interdisciplinary teacher teams are considered by some educators to be a 'keystone' practice for effective education in the middle grades" (Epstein & MacIver, 1990, p. 90). Indeed, most experts in the field recommend the use of such teams wherein a core staff of teachers teach different subjects (usually language arts, math, science, and social studies) to a common group of students. With such an approach, teachers plan and work together to meet the academic and personal needs of a common group of students, coordinate instruction, solve problems, and provide consistent expectations. Furthermore, the use of interdisciplinary teams often occurs in a setting within which blocks of instructional time are available to provide appropriate learning experiences for students, and flexible scheduling is possible. Considered to be an important component in effective middle level schools, flexible scheduling allows for students' need to be met. "The school schedule must be thought of as dynamic, alterable, and always subordinate to

changing requirements of students and faculty" (Superintendent's Task Force, p. 107).

MacIver (1990) reports that the most commonly reported benefits of interdisciplinary teaming are that teachers receive social support and understanding from other team members, instruction is more effective because of the integration and coordination across subject areas, students' problems are recognized more quickly and solved more effectively, and students bond with their team and improve in both their work and attitudes. The factor needed to obtain the most benefit from interdisciplinary teaming is adequate common planning time.

Advisory Groups

"...until the establishment of the middle school movement with its advisor/advisee, homebased, or teacher/adviss programs, relative little was done to implement fully programs that were directed at developing the social-emotional side of youth" (James, 1986, pp. 3-4). Thus, group advisory periods are a much recommended means of providing the socioemotional support so critical to young adolescents' healthy development and academic success (Carnegie Council, 1989; Cawelti, 1988; Epstein, 1990; James, 1986; MacIver, 1990; NMSA, 1982; Superintendent's Task Force, 1987). Advisory groups provide students with at least one adult that knows them well and offers the possibility of a close and trusting relationship with an adult -- an adult who knows and cares about them and is available to help them when they have problems. Advisors "become mentors to and advocates for their students" (Carnegie Council, 1989).

> A teacher-advisory program gives the chance to deliver guidance information to youngsters in a planned program. Teachers, under the direction of counselors, can give youngsters practice in communication skills, in decision-making, problem-solving, and group process, and in discussion of school problems and concerns (Cole, 1988, p. 11).

NMSA (1982) suggests that advisory periods "offer opportunities for interaction that lead to increased self-awareness, the consideration of values, and the

development of understandings needed to deal with various school, home, or peer related problems" (p. 13). Finally, research shows that schools with strong advisory programs not only are more successful at meeting students' needs for guidance, advice, and counseling, they lower the proportion of student dropouts (MacIver, 1990).

Exploratory Programs

Middle schools must provide an environment in which students can explore personal interests in addition to the regular academic curriculum (Doda, cited in Cawelti, 1988). NMSA (1982) points to the developmental characteristics of young adolescents as the basis for instituting an exploratory program:

> The rapid physical, social, and intellectual development which occurs during transescence requires the inclusion of brief but intense interest-based activities. A short attention span, difficulty in concentration, and the restlessness which accompanies changing physical bodies preclude learning modules which extend much beyond 15-20 minutes. Therefore, students should be involved in some units of study which meet for considerably less than an hour, less than a semester, and are tied to changing interests (p.12).

"Exploratory courses which allow students to experience new categories of skills and knowledge and to pursue special interests" (Superintendent's Task Force, 1987, p. 107) are, therefore, highly recommended for inclusion in middle level schools.

Transition Programs.

MacIver (1990) states that more than 88% of all public school students enter a new school when they start the middle grades and that this transition comes when they are undergoing the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual changes of early adolescence. The need to adjust to these simultaneous changes puts young adolescents at risk of being unable to cope; the potential thus exists for negative effects on their self-esteem, psychological adjustment, and motivation. Recognizing this, many educators are calling for transition programs that "help students make an orderly transition from elementary to middle grades, as well as from middle grades to high school" (Children's Defense Fund, 1988).

The most common components of a transition program include students visiting the new school before it starts, administrators of the schools meeting to discuss programs and transition, and counselors meeting with the school staff and counselors (MacIver, 1990). Other useful activities include having older students become buddies or mentors for younger students, allowing students to attend some classes at the new school, conducting summer meetings at the new school for incoming students, and communication between the new school and both new students and their parents. As Cawelti (1988) notes,

> Educators tend to underestimate the anxiety and confusion early adolescents often feel when making the transition from the child-centered elementary school to the more academically-oriented middle or junior high school. The uncertainties of new teachers, new friends, often a much larger school, and new kinds of social and academic experiences make it essential that school leaders plan together to minimize distress for newly arriving middle grade students (p. 4).

Appropriate Core Curriculum/Varied Teaching Strategies

> In the past, people were largely judged as "learned" by the facts and information they retained. Factual recall largely dominated how we taught and what transescents were supposed to learn. Today, information has an increasingly short life. In the information age people will be judged as "learned" by the degree to which they can think and process information...Our youth must gain the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors needed to consider the complex issues affecting contemporary life (Toepfer, Jr., 1990, pp. 96-97).

With this in mind, the middle grade school curriculum

> must be formulated with regard to the educational needs and characteristics of transescents students. While societal expectations are important and tradition ought not be ignored, a true middle school curriculum will actually be based largely on transescent needs...(and) balance academic and other human development needs (NMSA, 1982, p. 10).

In creating a core curriculum, both content and the student must be taken into account. "To address the needs of a diverse student body, curricula should engross students in learning and help them to develop a wide range of skills" (Children's Defense Fund, 1988, p. 8). Curriculum must deal with the basics but also include aesthetic and affective components as well as teach students to think

critically and develop healthy lifestyles; it must integrate subject matter across the curriculum and stress the goal of independent learning (Carnegie Council, 1989; Children's Defense Fund, 1988; NMSA, 1982).

Young adolescents not only possess different learning styles but also varied levels of readiness. In addition, there are gaps and inconsistencies in their stages of intellectual development, they have a limited attention span, yet are highly curious and creative (NMSA, 1982). Thus it is particularly important for teachers to use a wide variety of instructional methods so as to adequately address these diverse levels and conditions. To facilitate reaching all students, cooperative learning (students work together in small groups to learn), active learning strategies (students are encouraged to question and challenge, and engage in a wide variety of group and hands-on activities), and varied teaching styles (visual, kinesthetic, symbolic, and abstract means of presenting information) must be employed in addition to the traditional methods of direct instruction (teacher presentation, drill, practice) (Carnegie Council, 1989; Cawelti, 1988; Children's Defense Fund, 1988; NMSA, 1982; Superintendent Task Force, 1987).

Prepared, Caring, Empowering Teachers

Unfortunately, as the Carnegie Council (1989) points out, many of today's middle grade teachers dislike their work and/or are in the middle level school when their training and preference is for elementary or secondary school. Other teachers lack the confidence and skills to teach young adolescents.

> This situation must change drastically. The success of the transformed middle grade school will stand or fall on the willingness of teachers and other staff to invest their efforts in the young adolescent students. Teachers must understand and want to teach young adolescents and find the middle grade school a rewarding place to work (Carnegie Council, 1989, 9. 58).

The National Middle School Association (1982), in addressing the issue of middle grade teachers, maintains that

> The unique needs and characteristics of the middle school student dictate that a special type of educator implement the curriculum. Certainly a prerequisite for working with transescents should be a genuine desire to teach this age group...(and) a thorough understanding of the human growth and development of the transescents, for herein is the foundation of all middle school practices (p.10).

Likewise, the Superintendent's Task Force (1987) states that

> The predominant emphasis in current teacher and administrator professional preparation for the middle grades does not square with either the research findings related to the general qualities associated with teacher and administrator excellence or the particularized educational needs of young adolescents. This imbalance must be redressed if renewal and reform are to occur in middle grade education...it is essential that the preparation of middle grade teachers include specialized professional concentration (p.119).

More and more educators are calling for special preparation, and even endorsement or certification, for teaching in the middle level grades (Carnegie Council, 1989; Alexander & McEwin, 1989; McEwin & Thomason, 1989; NMSA, 1982; Superintendent's Task Force, 1987).

Alexander and McEwin (1989) suggests that middle grade teachers have these special needs: (1) an understanding of the developmental characteristics of young adolescents and the ability to deal with them; (2) competence to teach in a unique setting which includes interdisciplinary teaming; (3) mastery of the skills of learning and of their teaching at the middle level; and (4) other unique responsibilities that require special skills, understanding, and commitment to the middle level school and its students. McEwin and Thomason (1989) add that preparation is also necessary to help teachers be effective with mainstreamed, minority, at-risk, and culturally diverse populations. The Carnegie Council (1989) suggests that teachers need an understanding of the principles of guidance and preparation in working with broken and blended families, families of diverse backgrounds, and families which, for economic and other reasons, are experiencing stress that may affect their children's performance in school.

The Superintendent's Task Force (1987), citing Roueche and Baker, record the qualities of exemplary teachers. Such teachers have a strong commitment to their work and to their students; have an "integrated perception" of students, that is they view them as "whole individuals operating in a broader context beyond the classroom" (p. 118); are active listeners; are sensitive to the mood of a class or individual; build rapport by showing students respect, treating them fairly, and trusting them; show empathy; have high expectations; and are warm and caring. While these qualities are true for all exemplary teachers, they are particularly necessary for middle grade teachers because of the nature of the young adolescents they are teaching and the new environment in which these students find themselves.

Sale (1979), citing Hamachek's research review, suggests that good teachers differ from poor teachers in how they perceive others in five ways:

1. In general, they seem to have more positive perceptions of others.
2. They do not seem to be as prone to view others as critical, attacking people with ulterior motives; rather, they see them as potential friends.
3. They tend to use more democratic classroom procedures.
4. They seem to have the capacity to see things from another's point of view.
5. They do not appear to see students as persons "you do things to" but rather as self-dependent individuals to be valued and respected (p. 54).

He notes that "Some of the most important lessons that children obtain from teachers are often the ones teachers do not consciously teach at all -- lessons in human relations that teachers give to their children simply by just being themselves" (Sale, 1979, p. 56).

Purkey's model of invitational education is based on four assumptions and a "stance" which this author believes to be fundamental to the empowerment of students. The assumptions are:

1. People are able, valuable, capable of self-direction, and should be treated accordingly.

2. The teaching/learning process is a cooperative alliance in which process is as important as product.

3. People possess relatively untapped potential in all areas of human potential.

4. This potential can best be realized by places, policies, programs, and processes that are intentionally designed to invite development, and by people who consistently seek to realize this potential in themselves and others, personally and professionally (Purkey & Strahan, 1986, p. 2).

Purkey's invitational education begins with a particular stance, that is a theoretical position from which the teacher operates. The stance consists of four elements: *trust* (students have opportunities to make decisions and monitor their own behavior and are basically trusted; *intentionality* (which encourages accuracy and dependability and "leads to purpose, direction, and control of one's personal and professional life"; *respect* (for the "unique value, ability, and self-directing powers of each person...*whether or not* the respect is earned"; and *optimism* (that is, "a positive vision of human beings: that each person is able, valuable, capable of self-direction, and should be treated accordingly" [Purkey & Strahan, 1986, pp. 4-5]).

A basic premise of Purkey's invitational education "is that everything counts, and that human potential, though not always apparent, is always there...waiting to be discovered and invited forth."

Other issues

Other issues that are not addressed in this paper but are receiving attention by those who seek to transform middle level schooling for young adolescents include the use of grouping and tracking; assessment and evaluation; parental and community involvement; and interscholastic versus intramural sports.

A Final Note

This paper began by noting the recent focus of attention on young adolescents and middle level education. Calls for reform in one area or another are not uncommon in the educational community. The important question is: Will the

attention and recommendations lead to action and make any difference? Lewis (1990), in discussing the current concern, states that "Something deeper and more valid is required to break through the ennui of our institutions and of our young people" (p. 420). She recommends that policy makers stop listening only "to those who offer only the same tired answers" (p. 420) and listen to those who are actually making it work for young adolescents in their exemplary programs.

What these educators share, says Lewis (1990),

> ...is a *valuing*, in the broadest sense of the term, of young people and their potential. We know from research as well as from common sense that young people need respect, fairness, confidence in their growing integrity, and a sense of hope for themselves as human beings. By valuing young people, we keep them engaged and motivate them to set goals for themselves (p. 421).

The middle level programs that work value students; the result is that the students stay in school and achieve academically.

The undertaking of the current recommendations for transformed middle level education will require the very basic valuing of the recipients of the transformation: the young adolescents.

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